



Readings and Activities
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CURRICULUM APPROACHES



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FOREWORD

The Challenges of Curriculum Development and the Complexity of Learning

The meaningfulness and challenging nature of curriculum development is often reflected in the nature of this work, which is a continuous process without any visible end in sight. Each existing curriculum is evaluated – also criticised – and public debate, perhaps along with more systematic evaluation measures, always forms the basis for drafting a new curriculum. This is how democracy works within the school system. This is good since each curriculum – or at least the basis for each document – is public, a document shared by all concerned parties. A dear child cannot be left unattended for a single second.

Personally, I have had the good fortune to be closely involved over many years in both the general school system and in the development of curriculum foundations for teacher education and its implementation. One of the most important observations has been that the challenges and demands for change that curriculum reform entails are always closely linked to broader changes in society, which we can only rather inadequately take into consideration in the concrete implementation of a school curriculum. There is never enough time devoted to physical education – nor indeed to other subjects – whilst there is a dearth of the mathematics and natural science subjects needed to ensure Finland's global competitiveness. Fatigue, discontent and stress all too often determine the school atmosphere. So what should be done?

Evaluation as an On-going Curricular Process

In efforts to understand the relativity of these pressures, however, there have been a few calming moments. The series of earlier Finnish curricula (1952, 1970, 1985 and 1994) is a very solid indication that, throughout the post-war era, Finland has systematically developed a national curriculum. In recent years, the standard procedure has been, especially concerning curricula for general education, to call at some stage for an external, impartial evaluation. This was the method adopted, for example, in the most recent Finnish curriculum development process (OPS/1994) and its associated 'running-in' period (Norris, Asplund, MacDonald, Schostak & Zamorski 1996). At that time, and indeed previously during the 1980s, the Finnish education system was considered, according to European (OECD) assessment, to be high-level and extremely ambitious. In addition, learning outcomes have generally shown that none of the many areas making up Finland's extensive geography needs to feel ashamed (IEA international comparison of learning outcomes in school subjects).

Post-war educational policy in most northern European countries has produced school structures which, with small variations, contain the following guidelines:

- A 9 or 10-year-long comprehensive school model which, in practice, caters for all children eligible for schooling.
- The length of compulsory schooling has been and is being extended towards younger age groups (6 year-olds).
- Efforts towards maximum integration of disabled children in general education schools (community-based special education curricula to be implemented in Finland in 2000).
- Closer contacts between branches of so-called *post-secondary education* and also with higher education (e.g., polytechnics).

Ideologically this is a question of:

- maximally equal opportunities for education and a broad range of subjects available to all
- the abolition of educational privileges
- modernisation of curricula.

The Challenges of Curriculum Development and the Complexity of Learning

In the 1990s *multiculturalism* arrived in Finland, and it has come to stay, bringing new challenges to both schools and teacher education. These issues, too, require further investigation.

Methodologically, the easiest option is to work at the level of written documentation relevant to educational policy. Seidenfaden (1996) terms this level the *formulation arena*. It would be slightly more demanding to investigate what happens to students at the end of the chain – at the 'grass roots level' – and what is required of the teacher in order to solve educational problems.

Curriculum implementation can be evaluated both *quantitatively* and *qualitatively*. The difference between quantitative and qualitative evaluation is also probably reflected in different views of human nature. According to Lahdes (1986), in quantitative evaluation a person is seen as an object with a personality composed of certain characteristics, whilst in qualitative evaluation a person is seen as *the subject of evaluation and a continuously developing personality*. The learning concept in turn stems from the concept of human nature.

Socio-psychological Aspects of the Curriculum

The curriculum is, at least in principle, the central document in schoolwork. Demarcation between curricular studies and teaching method studies is often problematic in practice. Curricular study is based on the idea that *teaching should be planned thoroughly and systematically in order for it to become a sufficiently aware and objective-oriented process*. Besides schools, the foundations of the curriculum are also of central importance to *teacher education*.

Pedagogy and developmental psychology run parallel in curriculum work. In this way, *teaching has to comply with the principles and laws of learning and developmental psychology*. We can also conclude that particularly in an increasingly unifying Europe citizens *must possess the skills to serve their country, their continent and the entire world*. This calls for socially acceptable attitudes and a desire for peace.

Decentralisation of the curriculum, by which we mean the implementation of the wishes of local educational policy makers, and *individualisation*, which refers to 'schooling for all', is prominent in northern European curricula. Denmark has the longest traditions in this respect, the Finnish system remaining comparatively highly centralised until the 1970s and 80s. The implementa-

tion of the comprehensive school system has encountered cutbacks as a result of economic recession to the extent that every good idea about 'schooling for all' has not been fully implemented in Finland.

The quest for humanism and democracy in education and respect for law and one's fellow human beings are formal goals and objectives. Preparing ourselves to meet the demands of a rapidly changing society – the constant presence of that change, the need for continual education, the information explosion, rapid yet economically sound development, competition and integration: these are the challenges of today.

Present-day schooling is centred around the activity and relative freedom of the student. This activity usually takes the form of thought processes, and the forming or changing of attitudes. The students themselves do not always realise the extent of their own activity and at best they will perhaps only be aware of their own physical activity, i.e., their concrete actions. On the other hand, *the construction of meaning*, which is of central importance to school work, remains at least partly beyond their threshold of awareness. Often only after considerable time has passed do students perceive what they have become in terms of their intellectual qualities. Only human beings can be changed and renewed in this way.

Knowledge often takes shape more effectively and enjoyably when individuals sharing a common goal of study form small, active groups. In this way, knowledge acquisition and other learning processes become, in effect, a social activity. A *socio-constructivist* or *socio-constructionist* concept of learning implies that school-based learning is a phenomenon linked to social context and culture. It is comforting that school culture can also be changed. School culture is made up of elements, rather like construction scaffolding, the arrangement of which depends on the kinds of study structures that the school and school environment create.

In school pedagogy it is sensible to assume that *society* is a product of humankind, manifested both as objective and subjective reality. We continually shape the latter of these realities in everyday schoolwork, primarily through language, but hopefully also in other ways – by actively doing – by also 'handling' objective reality. Similarly, skills for continuous *knowledge acquisition* and attitudes towards lifelong learning demand our particular attention. Only when learning methods are examined together with the students can we best grasp the transience and relativity of knowledge.

In Conclusion

The book you are holding seeks to examine curriculum development in the context of educational psychology and educational sociology. The first section tackles curricular change, beginning with the foundations of learning, the teacher's professional growth and the learning organisation. The traditional model of *teaching* is seen as more interactive with emphasis on the activity of both pupil and teacher in terms of objectives, implementation and also assessment.

Schools clearly want a *co-operative* growth environment so that the basic security of pupils, their solid self-concept and joyful learning can be better realised. Of decisive importance is the professional skill of the teacher, employing *head, heart and hand* to promote active learning. New, improved arrangements for learning conditions do indeed also presuppose increased economic input on the part of those maintaining schools: the state and the community.

Some of the contributors have long experience of involvement in international co-operation aimed at comparing and evaluating curricula in different European countries. In addition to school policy decisions, the issue in such cases has been the pedagogical development of the school, not forgetting teacher education. In the second section of the book curricular change in England and Finland is considered along the axis of centralisation – decentralisation. In addition, demands for change are examined in four case-study schools. Universal trends in curricular change over the decades are indeed interesting to follow.

The third section presents an entirely new perspective on curriculum development. In the 1990s especially Finnish teacher education departments and also schools have provided teaching through the medium of a foreign language. Justifications for such content and language-integrated learning (CLIL) are associated with the concepts and methods of experiential learning. The discussion activities direct readers to examine the papers in the book in practice, in a foreign language or in their own language. The focus here is on *experiential, active learning*. I believe the book is admirably suited as the starting point for high-quality learning.

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